



# Bombers weather storm well

By Master Sgt. Jessica D'Aurizio  
917th Wing Public Affairs

**BARKSDALE AIR FORCE BASE, La.** – The B-52 can fly through dangerous territory while the enemy jams its radar, tries to shoot it from the sky, even when the ground quakes under its tires. But it was no competition for Typhoon Kulop.

The 93rd Bomb Squadron deployed to Andersen AFB, Guam, in early January to support the Air and Space Expeditionary Forces bomber rotation there. Briefly following their arrival, they encountered weather heading toward the island that ultimately forced the B-52s to flee from the area.

“The typhoon evacuation of the planes back to the mainland (Fairchild AFB, Wash.) put us squarely behind the eight ball, but everyone worked together in a real spirit of unity, and we came back exceeding all theater and major command maintenance effectiveness metrics,” said Chief Master Sgt. Clint Cates, 36th Expeditionary Maintenance Squadron Chief. When the planes left the island, the personnel quickly started filling sandbags to keep the heavy rains the typhoon would bring from flooding their work areas.

“When the crews evacuated to Washington, they were not prepared for the cold temperatures of zero degrees, but luckily, the personnel at Fairchild expected this and met them with parkas,” said Col. John Mooney, 36th Expeditionary Operations Group



**Tech. Sgts. John Paxton and Michael McDonald, 36th Expeditionary Aircraft Maintenance Squadron weapons loaders, and Tech. Sgt. David Fogg, 36th Expeditionary Munitions Squadron weapons loader, prepare to load MK-62 Quick Strike Navy mines onto a B-52. Approximately 250 members of the 917th Wing, including aircrew, maintenance and support personnel, deployed to Guam for 30 to 60 days in January to demonstrate the U.S. commitment to the Asian-Pacific region. (Photo by Master Sgt. Jessica D'Aurizio)**

commander. “They really took good care of our people.”

“We were expecting up to 75 mile-per-hour winds, and that is why we had to send the aircraft away,” said Production Supervisor Senior Master Sgt. Dennis Mummery, 36th Expeditionary Aircraft Maintenance Squadron. “We were fortunate that the storm veered east of us, and the island was spared from a potential natural disaster.”

Once the aircraft returned to the island, it was back to business, and the pace was picked up to make up

for lost time, according to Aircraft Maintenance Officer Capt. Warren Crabtree, 36 EAMXS. Even the earthquakes that continued during the entire rotation or the volcano dust that filled the air couldn't stop the sorties from happening.

“The people I worked with every night were exceptional in their job and really put forth an effort to get us back on schedule,” said Captain Crabtree. “They made it happen with their commitment to the team.”

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# What does it mean to be a 'Wingman?'

By Lt. Col. Lawrence O. Roche  
27th Intelligence Support Squadron  
commander

The Romans, while not the first to understand the central principle behind having "Wingmen," were some of the first to document the importance of the wing position.

The most basic Roman battle lines were arranged with the infantry in the center and cavalry on the wings. The main purpose of the cavalry was to protect the center from being outflanked. For the Army to succeed, it was imperative that the infantry and cavalry understood and followed a prearranged plan and moved with a single purpose. Separately, neither the infantry nor the cavalry stood much chance at defeating an opponent, but together, watching out for each other, they were a formidable force.

The Roman Empire and its lasting contributions to the civilized world would not have been possible without a well-disciplined Army and sound principles.

The weapons used to wage war have changed dramatically since the Romans, but the principles guiding their employment have not. Today, one of the most important and trusted positions in a formation aircraft belongs to the wingman. While we have exchanged horses for F-15s, the wingman's job remains the same;

*Just like the Romans,  
individually we will  
fail, but together we  
are a formidable  
force.*

to protect the lead aircraft.

So what does any of this have to do with us? As Airmen we are all part of a much larger team. The combined effect of individual efforts and skills make our Air Force the most powerful air force in the world. None of us could do our jobs without the support of others. We count on our teammates to do their part so we can do ours. We share a common purpose and we know when we need help, our teammates will be there to pitch in and make the mission a success. All of us need a wingman to succeed.

Being a good wingman is a 24-hour a day job. The principles apply both on and off duty and are anchored in personal commitment. A good wingman has many important qualities. First, they have a moral compass that always points true north. They know the right thing to do and they take action to do it. Second, they "keep their head on a swivel," searching the horizon for any sign of trouble and then stepping in to prevent it. Third, a good wingman learns to lead just as well as follow. We all must be prepared to step

up and lead when required, just as we must all be ready to follow once a decision is made.

Although these ideas may seem somewhat abstract, they translate easily into everyday actions. Actions can be as simple as asking a teammate how they are doing and then listening to them when they tell you, or to taking the keys from a friend who has had too much to drink.

Being a good wingman means ensuring that your supervisor isn't bogged down with disciplinary issues due to your momentary lack of judgment. It means taking the time to double check your work and fix any errors without being told.

A good wingman reminds their buddies about a meeting starting in five minutes. Being a good wingman means taking care of each other so the team can take care of the mission. It means protecting each other's flank. It means building and keeping our trust in one another.

Our nation counts on us to defend its greatest possession, freedom. When we joined the Air Force we accepted that challenge and responsibility and the price of failure is unacceptable.

Just like the Romans, individually we will fail, but together we are a formidable force. Our fellow Airmen and country depend on us to be great wingmen.

## The "Mighty Eighth" Voice

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## RED HORSE rigger reacts rapidly to red-hot ruckus

By Maj. Laurie Arellano  
Public affairs office

**MALSTROM AIR FORCE BASE, Mont.** – For Staff Sgt. John Rood, 819th RED HORSE Squadron, Feb. 5 is a day that will be remembered as one ordinary day punctuated with an extraordinary event.

Sergeant Rood was filling up his vehicle that typical Saturday afternoon at a gas station on 10th Avenue South when an unexpected chain of events began to happen around him.

“I saw a lady fueling her sport utility vehicle behind me,” he said. “I had just finished fueling when I saw fire coming from the rear of her vehicle.”

The sergeant said the woman appeared frozen with fear and had a shocked look on her face as he headed for the vehicle to help her.

“I was reaching to grab the nozzle out of the truck when I saw a child seat in the back, right over the fuel tank,” Sergeant Rood said. “My first thought was to remove the source of the fire from the vehicle, which was also on fire.”

The fuel nozzle became a big flame thrower as he pulled it out of the truck. He laid the nozzle and hose so the fire would flow away from the vehicle.



**Great Falls firefighters extinguish a vehicle fire at the Town Pump located on the corner of 14th Street South and 10th Avenue South Feb. 5. (Tribune Photo by Larry Beckner)**

*“Right after she pulled the child out, the vehicle exploded.”*

*Staff Sgt. John Rood  
819th RED HORSE Squadron*

That action allowed the mother enough time to unstrap her child from the seat as Sergeant Rood went to activate the emergency shut off switch.

“Right after she pulled the child out, the vehicle exploded,” Sergeant Rood said.

The thick black smoke could be seen from some

distance and flames from the blaze scorched the canopy at the station.

“He was trying to do the right thing,” said Steve Hester, Great Falls Fire Department assistant fire chief.

The assistant chief said Sergeant Rood’s instinct to look for the emergency shut-off switch was the right course of action. In a

situation like this, the best thing you can do is to get everyone away from the fire and activate that emergency shut-off switch, he added.

Sergeant Rood said he doesn’t believe he did anything that any other citizen wouldn’t have done.

“I just happened to be the one there at the time,” he said.

Col. Robert Staib, 819th RED HORSE commander, credits training for Sergeant Rood’s quick actions.

“He was doing what most RED HORSE guys do,” Colonel Staib said. “You see a situation and take action.”



## 819th RED HORSE Squadron hosts 8th AF/CC

By Capt. Madison Morris  
819th RED HORSE Squadron

### MALSTROM AIR FORCE BASE, Mont. –

Lt. Gen. Bruce Carlson, Eighth Air Force commander, visited Malmstrom Feb. 2 to catch up with the 819th RED HORSE Squadron's latest accomplishments and to present awards to several of the squadron's members.

General Carlson received briefings about 819th RHS' unique capabilities such as soils analysis and concrete testing.

"A concrete breaker enables us to check how strong the concrete is, so we can ensure the concrete supplier's product matches specifications," Staff Sgt. Pratt Vivekanandan, an engineer assistant explained to the general.

The general also visited the unit's power production personnel, who for example, install aircraft arresting barriers, which are used by the Thunderbirds for air shows around the country.

Vehicle maintenance personnel were also present to brief the general on their latest money and time saving initiatives.

"We're installing a solargizer battery maintenance system on the 819th RHS fleet," stated Senior Airman Canaan Chapman, vehicle maintenance journeyman.



**Lt. Gen. Bruce Carlson, Eighth Air Force commander, poses with Tech. Sgt. Lawrence Litman and his wife during his visit to the 819th RED HORSE Squadron. General Carlson surprised Sergeant Litman with a STEP promotion. (Courtesy photo)**

The system uses solar power to put a pulse charge on several types of vehicle batteries, he continued.

"The benefits of using this technology on the vehicle charging system are extended life of the alternator, starter and life of the battery," he added.

Airborne RED HORSE was also given the opportunity to brief the general, but in a different format.

The unit put on an air insertion training scenario with the help of the 40th Helicopter Flight.

The 40th HF provided two helicopters to transport nine personnel to an airfield

damage repair training area on the west side of base, where the personnel were deployed, and began repairing a 20-foot crater using a mobile airfield repair equipment set specially designed for airborne operations.

The scenario represented one facet of airborne RED HORSE's capabilities.

"In addition to using helicopters to insert our personnel and equipment, we also have the capability to be airdropped onto an airfield," said Master Sgt. Don Prohaska, acting airborne flight superintendent.

Currently, the flight has 12 personnel that have

graduated the Army's Basic Airborne Course at Fort Benning, Ga., and have an average 16 jumps each, he added.

The Airborne RED HORSE team's responsibilities are to parachute or sling load onto captured enemy airfields to assess and prepare them for aircraft operations.

"The idea started during Operation Allied Force and came to be in Operation Enduring Freedom," explained Capt. Casey Bartholomew, airborne RHS team lead.

"The Air Force wanted to use certain enemy airfields but couldn't because the runways were too damaged to land on, and it was too unsafe to transport engineers to repair them. As a result, the Air Force had to use less desirable locations," Captain Bartholomew said.

To ensure this never happened again Gen. John Jumper, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, tasked Air Force civil engineering to develop an airborne engineer capability. The 819th RHS is one of three units to have this capability, he continued.

"We also need to have the ability to clear munitions, check for possible nuclear, biological and chemical contamination, and provide fire fighting

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# Meet the president

## *Airman selected for presidential inauguration detail*

By Tech. Sgt. Sherri Savant  
917th Wing Public Affairs

**BARKSDALE AIR FORCE BASE, La.** – Being in the nation's capital, ankle deep in snow with a five-degree wind chill factor didn't stop one 917th Wing Airman from doing his duty recently. Senior Airman Reginald Ross found himself in this position more than once while serving with the Air Force Honor Guard during Presidential Inauguration Week in January.

The 917th security policeman is one of 30 base Honor Guard members throughout the United States selected to serve in this elite detail.

"We were history in the making," Airman Ross said. While there, he was part of the first group of base Honor Guard members to ever perform funeral details with the Air Force Honor Guard, based at Bolling AFB, Washington, D.C.

Perhaps his most memorable experience, Airman Ross said, was being part of one of two 27-man flights at the farewell of former Secretary of the Air Force Dr. James Roche. Air-



**Above, Senior Airman Reginald Ross (pictured first row, far left), 917th Security Forces Squadron policeman and member of the Barksdale Honor Guard, stands in formation at Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington, Va., with other Honor Guard members, all who were selected to participate in various events during Presidential Inauguration Week in January. (Courtesy photo) Below, Airman Ross practices flag folding prior to going to Washington D.C. (Photo by Tech. Sgt. Sherri Savant)**

man Ross' duties included ceremonial movements like *present arms* and *stand at ease*, all done while holding an M-14 rifle with a fixed bayonet.

"He (Secretary Roche) did a walk through of the troops before we actually started the ceremony, so that was a pretty good thing, to be that close to someone of such high importance," Airman Ross said.

Although Airman Ross didn't participate in the actual presidential inauguration detail due to last-minute changes in plans, he said he still considers the whole experience "well worth it." "Adapt and overcome," he said.

"He (Airman Ross) epitomizes service before self and is always will-

ing and eager to take on new challenges and greater responsibilities," said Master Sgt. Nordyca Woodfork, his supervisor at the Barksdale Honor Guard and a 917th Medical Squadron member.

New opportunities, not only for him but for the entire Barksdale Honor Guard, are what Airman Ross said he hopes will come from what may have been a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for him. He is quick to thank all the people who made it possible for him to make the trip—especially Brig. Gen. Jack Ihle, 917th Wing commander.

"I just want to thank God for the opportunity to be able to go out and experience all these good, life-altering experiences," Airman Ross said





*From FTAC to AEF:*

## Driving home the reality of deployment

*By Senior Airman Neo Martin*

509th Bomb Wing Public Affairs

**WHITIEMAN AIR FORCE BASE, Mo.** — “Who here thinks they’ll deploy within the next year? Everybody raise your hands. Take a good look, this is what you will be wearing,” the Kevlar-helmeted, flak vest-wearing, desert-combat-uniformed instructor said.

The cadre at Whiteman’s First-Term Airmen Course is the first in the Air Combat Command to implement this new approach to the Air and Space Expeditionary Force briefing. In an effort to prepare the new Airmen for Air Force life the usual AEF briefing was equipped with full battle rattle and deployment bags. We want to give our Airmen the most realistic portrait of the AEF possible. We owe it to our Airmen to do everything possible to prepare them for deployment,” Master Sgt. Warren Weakley, 509th Bomb Wing Career Advisor, said.

During an ACC FTAC conference in November 2004, Chief Master Sgt. Rodney Ellison, ACC command chief master sergeant, informed all FTAC NCOs in charge that Airmen must be in an expeditionary mindset.

“We were told a story where alarms were going off on an installation, and everyone was taking cover — all but one Airman. When in-

structed to take cover by a senior leader, the Airman replied, ‘It’s okay, I’m not on duty,’” Tech. Sgt. David Hodges, FTAC NCO in charge, said. “Reinforcing the proper procedures for exercise and real world situations must be at the heart of what we do.”

The need for an updated approach to the AEF briefing became apparent as the Air Force AEF cycle evolved into a four-month rotation in September 2004.

“During basic military training, all Airmen are taught the AEF war cry — ‘airpower ... space power, AEF!’ Unfortunately, the Airmen are not taught why they learned it,” Sergeant Hodges said. “That’s our fo-

cus — to teach the Airmen why AEF is so important in our lives. Everyone from the cop to crew chief and transporter to civil engineer needs to understand their role and the impact it will have on their lives.”

With that in mind, the new briefing was constructed to give a hands-on approach complete with more than 90 photos of servicemembers living and working in a deployed environment.

“Have your bags

packed,” Sergeant Hodges said. “Getting the call at 5 a.m. and realizing your mobility bags aren’t packed is not the best way to begin a deployment.”

Aside from detailing the packing list, the 17-year veteran shared some “tricks of the trade” for ensuring the contents of the bags aren’t only present, but not damaged or spoiled. “Keeping your toiletries and clothing in plastic bags can prevent a lot of problems,” Sergeant Hodges said. “I’ve seen people deploy with spiders. A little preparation can

go a long way.”

During the briefing, Sergeant Hodges’ mood became serious, as he passed around Kevlar body armor plates

and a helmet. “This is what you have for protection ... this and your training,” he said, hammering lessons learned from their classes and briefings. “We reinforce the importance of paying attention in chemical warfare defense training, weapons training, self-aid and buddy care, etc. We even discuss the preparation we need for our social and personal lives. Proper preparation, from all angles, brings us home to our loved ones.”

The new AEF briefing brought deployment perspectives and challenges to the first group of FTAC students to attend.

“We received some briefings like this in (BMT), but this really has been brought me a first-hand view,” said Airman 1st Class Brad Couvillo, 509th Maintenance Squadron. “I feel better prepared and motivated to deploy.”

Whiteman’s FTAC instructors plan on sharing the results and feedback with the rest of their community. “We (ACC FTAC) are a huge network sharing ideas to benefit Airmen across the globe,” Sergeant Hodges said.

“I feel we practice and exercise enough, but reality checks are not common,” Hodges said. “Putting on the DCUs with full battle rattle gives a more realistic touch to our AEF briefing. Some Airmen aren’t prepared because they don’t know (what to expect from) deployments until it happens. By then, it’s too late.

“With the outstanding training the Airmen now receive from CWDT, combat arms training and maintenance instructors, to name a few, and the efforts of unit deployment managers, coupled with the orientation we’re providing,” he said, “the Airmen will be prepared!”

*“Have your  
bags  
packed.”*

*Tech. Sgt. David Hodges  
Whiteman First Term Airman  
Course NCOIC*

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**Tech. Sgt. Clifford Brown, 36th Expeditionary Aircraft Maintenance Squadron electronic warfare systems mechanic, hoists up a drag chute to repack it into the tail of a B-52.**

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capabilities in the event an aircraft goes down,” said Tech. Sgt. John Dziok, 366th Civil Engineer Squadron, explosives ordnance disposal technician at Mountain Home AFB, Idaho.

“To do this the 819th RHS teams with the 366th CES at Mountain Home to use their EOD, fire and readiness personnel,” he said

During the last part of his tour

on base, General Carlson held a commander’s call in the base theater where he announced the squadron’s yearly award winners and presented them with trophies.

He then surprised the audience with a special presentation. After calling Staff Sgt. Mike Litman, an airborne pavement and equipment operator, to the front of the auditorium, the general promoted him to techni-

Approximately 300 people of various skills deployed to enhance regional security in the Asian-Pacific region. They integrated B-52 operations into U.S. Pacific Command’s joint and coalition forces. One joint exercise included Navy Operations.

“We worked jointly with the Navy and built approximately 150 MK-62 Quick Strike Navy mines,” said Senior Master Sgt. Darold Fish, 36th Expeditionary Munitions Squadron superintendent.

The main part of the Navy’s training consisted of the buildup. In the states, the B-52 will sometimes drop mines for the Navy to retrieve, but in this case, they were irretrievable, according to Colonel Mooney.

These mines were dropped in the Marianas Trench, which is the deepest part of the ocean.

This is basically an MK-82 bomb body with a fuse and target detection

device added to it so it can explode on impact or when metal comes into close contact with it, according to Master Sgt. Johnnie Gilbert, 36 EAMXS weapons flight chief. These mines are inert, which means they contain no explosives.

In addition to mine building with the Navy, the B-52s also participated in fighter intercept exercises with jets from Kadena Air Base, Japan.

They dropped M-117s on the Farallon Islands for their own training and enhanced regional security, while underscoring the U.S. commitment to the Western Pacific.

“Our first week was perfect, 10 for 10, and then the typhoon evacuation happened,” said Col. Mooney. “Despite all the frustrations and challenges, the people have really stepped up and taken it in stride. We can be described like Ivory soap, 99.99 percent pure.”

cal sergeant through the stripes for exceptional performers program.

“Mike is a great, hard working leader that is very deserving of this recognition,” said Senior Master Sgt. Mike DeShon, outgoing airborne flight superintendent. “Like many others in this unit, he shows his commitment, unity and teamwork every day, living up to the 819th RHS charge to be... a cut above.”

## Skywalker: Ex-Soldier trained in all Whiteman aircraft

By Senior Airman Joe Lacdan  
509th Bomb Wing Public Affairs

**WHITEMAN AIR FORCE BASE, Mo.** — A bump along the aviation road didn't stop Sean Walker.

In fact, it may have paved the way for the 325th Bomb Squadron captain to make the Whiteman history books.

The 36-year-old is the only pilot to become certified in each aircraft that calls Whiteman home: the T-38 Talon, the A-10 Thunderbolt II, the Apache helicopter and, of course, the B-2 Spirit Bomber.

"It wasn't planned — that's for sure," said Captain Walker, the 325th BS chief of standards and evaluations. "It just kind of worked out that way."

Growing up with dreams to become a pilot in upstate New York, Captain Walker didn't receive the Air Force pilot training scholarship he desired coming out of Mexico High School in Mexico, N.Y.

So he opted for a different route: the U.S. Army Warrant Officer flight training program in the spring of 1988.

"Things happen for a reason," Walker said. "This was just the way my path was supposed to go."

His path in the Army took him



**Capt. Sean Walker**

on a seven-year journey where he learned to fly some of the military's most prestigious choppers including the Apache, OH-58 Kiowa and the UH-1H Iroquois.

"I got a lot of experience out of it," Walker said. "We got to do a lot of neat stuff."

Walker flew Apaches during Operation Desert Storm against the fleeing Iraqi republican guard. While he spent much of his Army career hitting targets, he also spent time hitting the books.

Walker graduated from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University with

a degree in professional aeronautics. His interest in aviation began early in his life.

Watching an Air National Guard unit fly A-10s over his upstate New York home as a 10-year-old spawned dreams of flying the powerful aircraft.

Captain Walker realized that dream in the fall of 1997 after he joined the Air Force in the summer of 1995. He reported to Davis Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz., for A-10 training and his Air Force first duty assignment at Eielson AFB, Alaska. He also flew A-10 combat missions in Operation Desert Fox and Operation Southern Watch.

"I was thrilled," Captain Walker said. "I've always wanted

to fly jets in the Air Force and I've always loved the A-10."

After working as an instructor pilot at Moody AFB, Ga., he decided to apply for the B-2 and T-38 program.

In the summer of 2001, Captain Walker met Lt. Col. Robert Duncan, a former B-2 pilot and current 442nd Fighter Wing member, and learned about the B-2 program. In June 2004, Walker completed T-38 and B-2 training.

"I think I've accomplished a lot," Captain Walker said. "It's been diverse, rewarding and fun."



# All roads lead to Robins

## Fort Walton Beach natives now work side by side

By Airman Paul R. Ross  
116th ACW Public Affairs

**ROBINS AIR FORCE BASE, Ga.** – 372,153 ... is not the dollar value of a Joint Stars aircraft or the number of Air Force bases in the world.

That is the number of people who made up the active-duty Air Force in 2004.

Many people in the Air Force know someone from their hometown who is part of that statistic. But one might never imagine that with all those people, they'd end up working beside someone who has a diploma from the same high school.

That is precisely what three officers from the 16th Airborne Command and Control Squadron thought ... until they got to Robins.

As well as all being members of the 16th ACCS, Maj. Eddie Boxx, 1st Lt. Jason Scott and 2nd Lt. T.J. Britt are all graduates of Fort Walton Beach High School, Fort Walton Beach, Fla. Major Boxx and Lieutenant Scott are flyers on the JSTARS and Lieutenant Britt is awaiting pilot training here.

Although they all graduated different years, they all share the same "Viking" pride and cherish their school colors which ironically enough are red, white and blue.



**Maj. Eddie Boxx, left, assistant duty officer for the 16th Airborne Command and Control Squadron, 1st Lt. Jason Scott, 16th ACCS air weapons officer, and 2nd Lt. T.J. Britt, who is awaiting undergraduate pilot training, walk off the flight line recently. (Photo by Airman Paul R. Ross)**

The three Florida natives all attended different colleges. They all went to many different places and traveled different roads on their way to becoming officers in the United States Air Force. Yet they all ended up not only at the same base, but the same squadron, flying on the same plane to accomplish the same mission.

Like many high school students, they were all members of sports teams and clubs.

"It is an easy transition from one team to another due to the camaraderie and

pride that the members of our Air Force possess," said Major Boxx, senior director in charge of operations team.

For some members of the Air Force, it may be difficult coming into a new work environment. It was a different story for Lieutenant Britt.

"It's good coming into a situation where you are new and already having connections with people you work with," said Lieutenant Britt.

The three officers sit in an office while being interviewed and pass around Major Boxx's year book.

They joke with each other and tell stories of their past "glory days." Major Boxx showed the two lieutenant's a picture of himself on the swim team being coached by Lieutenant Britt's mother.

Lieutenant Scott remembers dating cheerleaders that Lieutenant Britt's mother coached. He remembers dropping out of Lieutenant Britt's father's Trigonometry and Analytical Geometry classes and playing on the 1995 State Championship Football team that Britt's dad helped

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# Airman departs home for better life

By Senior Airman Joe  
Lacdan  
509th Bomb Wing Public Affairs

## WHITEMAN AIR FORCE BASE, Mo. —

She didn't want the desert to swallow her.

Not that Gina Benally didn't love her northwestern New Mexico home, or her four brothers and sisters that shared her dark hair, dark eyes and Navajo heritage.

But she knew her hometown, Shiprock, N.M., had a way of keeping its inhabitants. Once the desert has you, it doesn't let go, said the 19-year-old airman first class.

She said most of Shiprock's natives never leave its borders, partly because of poverty and few educational and career opportunities.

She wanted to leave behind the drunken father she hardly knew; the dry, sweltering heat of the Southwest and the anxiety

of an uncertain tomorrow.

"Seeing how my dad is now — it's not how I want to be," Airman Benally said of her father, who is serving time in a state prison for multiple cases of alcohol abuse. "After seeing how my mom struggled to raise me and my brothers and sisters — I didn't want to be like that."

She had grown sick of watching her mother, Regina, return to their one-story home weary from working two jobs, 60 hours a week to support Airman Benally and her four siblings. Airman Benally, the eldest of the children, worried each day if her mother could pay the family's bills or whether her siblings would have clothes.

Then, a friend from her high school told her about the Air Force. It was a chance to provide for herself, her family and serve her country.



"I thought it would be a good opportunity," said the 509th Munitions Squadron member. "I just knew this was a way out of staying there and becoming like everybody else. I wanted to see what I can do with my life."

The winter during her senior year at Shiprock High, Airman Benally enlisted in the Air Force. After receiving a job as a munitions systems apprentice, she attended technical training at Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas, before arriving here in the fall of 2003.

Now she plans to take advantage of opportunities her old life never gave her: free education, economic stability and most importantly, giving her mother and younger siblings little things they never enjoyed.

"She's extremely motivated," said her supervisor, Staff Sgt. Michael Dixon. "Out of all the young Airmen I've seen, she's the quickest (learner)."

"Before it was, 'How's my mom going to pay for this, how's she going to pay for that,'" she said. "I was thinking about all the stuff my mom wouldn't have enough to pay for. I'm better off now than I was before."

Airman Benally is still deciding whether to make the Air Force her career or pursue her dream of becoming an athletic trainer.

"I'm glad I'm not stuck (at home) where you can't do anything with your life," she said. And, out of the desert's grasp.

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coach. Lieutenant Scott still has the ring he received from his days on the football team. It showed how much pride he has in his alma mater.

They each joined the Air Force for a different reason. Major Boxx spent four years in the Army and then gravitated back to the familiar by joining the Air Force.

Lieutenant Scott joined to pay for his college degree from Florida State University.

Lieutenant Britt joined because he was accepted into the Air Force

Academy and family tradition.

They each had their own goals in their careers and in life. But they all attributed coming from a town that is home to the Air Force Armament Museum and where Eglin AFB is just seven miles southwest and Hurlburt Field is a mere five mile east as a large factor to joining the Air Force.

Things have changed since the days where Major Boxx, who now drives a BMW Z4, used to run wherever he had to go.

Lieutenant Scott doesn't date

anymore cheerleaders, he is now happily married.

Lieutenant Britt doesn't have his dad, who was vice principal while he was in school, following him to class everyday.

They still have the pride that they once had for the FWBHS red, white and blue. But now it is also reserved for that same combination of colors which represent something very different. Not just "Viking" pride, but pride for the Air Force and for the United States of America.